

TEACHING AND ASSESSING FOUNDATIONAL MUSICIANSHIP WITH COMPOSITION

MAMEA Conference
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Rhythmic Considerations

- * Demonstrate a rhythmic feel throughout
- * Employ various rhythm patterns while maintaining rhythmic feel
- * Develop rhythmic ideas that relate to and complement the original idea
- * Develop rhythmic motives in the overall concept of form

Melodic Considerations

- * Demonstrate a variety of related ideas
- * Demonstrates motivic development (melodic or rhythmic sequences)
- * Demonstrates purposeful melodic contour
- * Embellish melody with non-harmonic tones

The Challenge

Ensemble directors often feel at a loss for ways to incorporate creativity, improvisation, and composition into rehearsals.

Teachers will not teach what they do not understand and cannot do themselves because they lack the necessary skills. (Conway, 2008; Shuler, 1995)

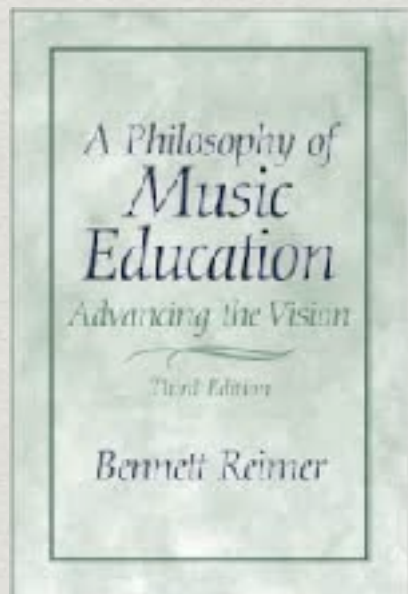
“I do not have much experience with composition myself and am unsure how to teach it to students.” (Shouldice, 2014 p.225)

Music theory is often employed for this task, but without a creative context.



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Convergent vs. Divergent thinking

“Teaching composition is much more similar to what occurs in the art studio than what occurs in the rehearsal room.”

(A Philosophy of Music Education, p. 286)

Listen, Play, Read & Write

“... your students will learn music most efficiently by a process similar to the process for learning language... That is, children listen and interact with their indigenous language before they speak, and only after considerable listening and speaking, do they learn to read and write.”

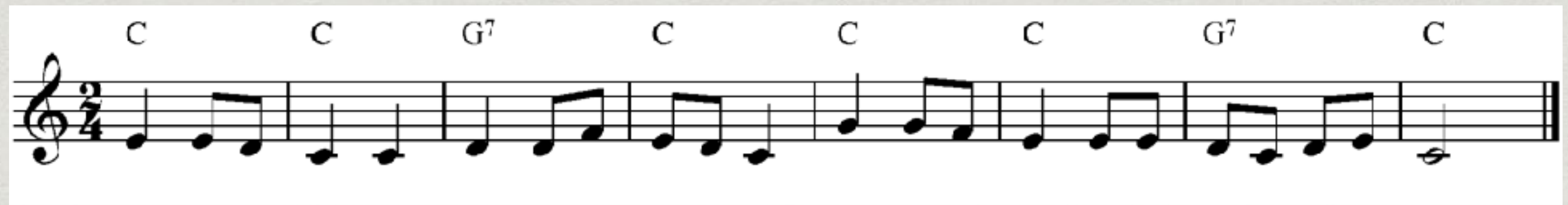
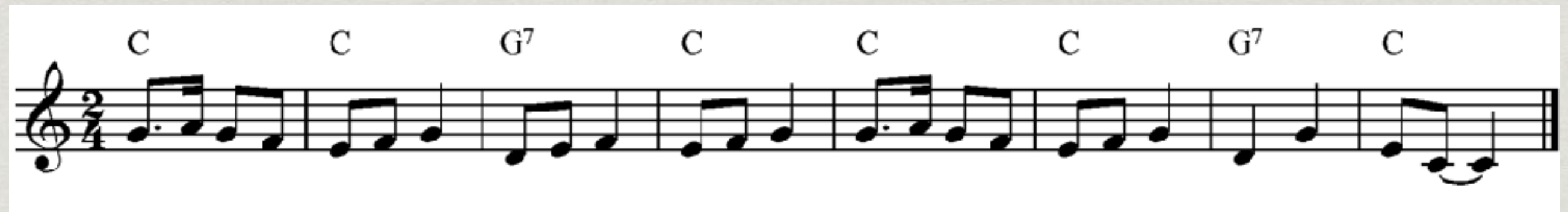
(-Audea, Spring 2009, p.4)



***Creativity is divergent thinking
informed by context!***

- Conversational vocabulary informs written vocabulary.
- A language teacher helps students to learn spelling and proper usage of words to build vocabulary and composition skills.
- We should be doing those same things in music lessons and ensemble settings.
- The key is to teach what most people would call music theory in a non-theoretical manner.
- This requires us to always stay a step or two behind what the students can audiate, sing and play.

The Tunes



Things to Notice

- All the pieces follow the same chord pattern.
- Each of the pieces reuses rhythms.
- Chord tones fall on all (but one) beat.
- Pieces move mostly by step or third.

WRITING A CONTRACT (AKA - YOUR TURN)

“MARY’S DEAD GOOSE ON LONDON BRIDGE”

Using the chord progression from the model song, write the bass line (chord roots only) on the bottom staff and your own melody on the top staff.

Re-use rhythms

End on “DO”

Assignment two allows passing and neighboring tones

Assignment three asks for lazy voice leading of inner parts

CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES

GRADE 4

8 MONTHS IN BAND

Chocolate chip Cookies (BY: [redacted])
(TITLE)

Flute
piano

Tonic dom dom Tonic C

Dom Sub dom tonic tonic

Dom Tonic Sub dom Tonic C

Form and Re-use of Material

- * Composition: The action of putting things together; formation or construction



AABABA Form

Twelve bar blues

The image displays a musical score for a 12-bar blues in F major, 4/4 time. The score is organized into three systems, each containing a treble and bass staff. The first system (bars 1-4) features a melody in the treble staff and a bass line in the bass staff. The second system (bars 5-8) continues the melody and bass line. The third system (bars 9-12) concludes the piece. The key signature is one flat (Bb), and the time signature is 4/4. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes, while the bass line is primarily composed of half notes. The chord progression is indicated by letters above the staff: F, Bb, F, F7 in the first system; Bb, Bb, F, F in the second system; and C7, C7, F, F in the third system.

1 F Bb F F⁷

5 Bb Bb F F

9 C⁷ C⁷ F F

BLUE BRICKS

GRADE 5 SAX TRIO WITH
RHYTHM SECTION

Handwritten musical score for "Blue Bricks" (TITLE) for Saxophone and Rhythm Section.

The score is written on three systems, each with a saxophone staff and a rhythm section staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4.

System 1:

- Saxophone staff: Four measures of music.
- Rhythm section staff: Four measures of music.
- Chord boxes below the rhythm staff: D7, G7, D7, D7.

System 2:

- Saxophone staff: Four measures of music.
- Rhythm section staff: Four measures of music.
- Chord boxes below the rhythm staff: G7, G7, D7, D7.

System 3:

- Saxophone staff: Four measures of music.
- Rhythm section staff: Four measures of music.
- Chord boxes below the rhythm staff: A7, G7, D7, D7.

Process before Product

- * Quality writing is not about talent or magic, it is about revision. Write, listen, revise, and repeat the process.
- * Students must begin with a familiar musical idea. Otherwise we are asking them to write in a language they do not speak.
- * Composition is simply improvisation and exploration with “do-overs.”



Assessment

Composition (Additive Dimension, 0–5)

The composer

- 1 - demonstrates a variety of related ideas and reused material in the context of form.
- 1 - demonstrates motivic development through tonal and rhythm sequences.
- 1 - includes effective use of silence.
- 1 - shows evidence of purposeful melodic contour.
- 1 - includes non-chord tones and/or neighbor tones to embellish and enhance melody.

Rhythm (Continuous Dimension, 0–5)

The composer

- 1 - notates individual beats without a sense of the meter.
- 2 - demonstrates a rhythmic feeling of the meter throughout.
- 3 - employs various rhythm patterns without a sense of rhythmic development.
- 4 - begins to develop and relate rhythmic ideas that complement the original melody.
- 5 - develops rhythmic motives in the context of the overall form.

Harmonic Progression (Continuous Dimension, 0–5)

The composer

- 1 - demonstrates knowledge patterns through grouping of harmonic content.
- 2 - notates most (80%) patterns in one function correctly
- 3 - notates most (80%) patterns in two functions correctly
- 4 - uses guide tones appropriately in at least one function change 5 - notates all tonic/dominant functions and guide tones correctly

Written Conventions (Additive Dimension, 0–5)

The composer

- 1 - includes clef and key signature appropriate to the original melody (as notated).
- 1 - includes time signature appropriate to the original melody (as notated).
- 1 - observes appropriate beat spacing throughout the composition. (80%)
- 1 - draws stems and beams appropriately. (80%)
- 1 - notates a composition that is legible and could be read by an average high school musician.

This even works for real music

- Using the chord progression and harmonic rhythm from one of the sections of Ob-La-Di Ob-La-Da, write your own melody
- Remember the tonal patterns and the contour of the original. Try to construct your melody in an informed manner.



Where to go from here?

- Build a connection to the literature you are playing or singing.
- Any topics from theory can be covered, it just requires YOU doing your homework and inverting the traditional model. Find pieces that use whatever concept you want to teach. Teach the pieces first, (yes, more than one) and then name the concept.
- musictheoryexamples.com - (well over 3,000 examples!)
- Transfer is a difficult and rocky road. It's OK if the process is messy. Some get it quick and some take **LOTS** of time.

Many thanks to

- * Rob Bickford & his students.
- * John Mills & his students.
- * Dr. Chris Azzara & Dr. Alden Snell.



QUESTIONS?



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